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DEFENSE OF CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA,

In 1862, 1863 and 1864.

II.

THE repulse of Admiral Dupont's iron-clad fleet before Charleston had not been looked upon as a thing possible by the North; and when the news of the Federal discomfiture reached that section, it engendered a heavy gloom of disappointment and discouragement—a feeling not unlike that which had prevailed there after the Confederate victory at Manassas, on July 21st, 1861. It was clear to me, however, that the enemy, whose land forces had not co-operated in this naval attack, would not rest upon his defeat, but would soon make another effort, with renewed vigor, and on a larger scale. Public opinion at the North would have given the Federal Administration no quiet had nothing further been attempted to retrieve what the New York Herald had already called “one of our most discouraging disasters,” and another journal had denounced as “a shameful abandonment of the siege.” I was therefore very much concerned when, scarcely a week afterward, the War Department compelled me to send back to North Carolina Cooke's and Clingman's commands, and, early in May, two other brigades, numbering 5,000 men, with two batteries of light artillery, to re-enforce General Joseph E. Johnston, at Jackson, Mississippi. The fact is, that on the 10th of May, Mr. Seddon, the Secretary of War, had even directed that still another force of 5,000 men should be withdrawn from my department to be sent to Vicksburg to the assistance of General Pemberton. But my protest against so exhaustive a drain upon my command was fortunately heeded, and I was allowed to retain the reduced force I then had under me, amounting on the 1st of June, for the whole State of North Carolina, to not more than 10,000 men. With these, it was evident, I could not protect each and every vulnerable point at the same time, and, henceforth, whenever the occasion arose, I had to withdraw troops from one quarter of the department to re-enforce another.

When, on the 12th of June, 1863, General Gillmore relieved

General Hunter and assumed command of what was called "the Department of the South," the enemy already occupied "Folly Island, north of the Stono; Seabrook Island, on the north Edisto; St. Helena Island, Port Royal Island, Hilton Head Island, Tybee Islands, Fort Pulaski, Ossabaw Islands, Fort Clinch, and Amelia Island, and the City of St. Augustine."* The fact that a new commander, of high engineering repute, had been sent to supersede General Hunter, confirmed me in the opinion that we would not have to wait long before another and more serious attack was made. A further reason for such a belief was the presence at that time of six Federal regiments on Folly Island, under Brigadier-General Vogdes, an officer of merit, perfectly familiar with Charleston and the surrounding country, he having been stationed at Fort Moultrie before the war. I had notified the War Department to that effect by a telegram dated May the 10th. It read as follows :

"Enemy in force on Folly Island, actively erecting batteries yesterday."

Again on the 15th of June, speaking of the depletion of the forces under me, I drew the attention of the War Department to the danger of an attack by Morris Island, and even indicated the possible result of General Gillmore's operations. I said :

". . . The force in the department is already at the minimum necessary to hold the works around Charleston and Savannah, constantly menaced by the proximity of the enemy's iron-clads.

"The garrison of no work in the harbor can be withdrawn or diminished, as they are all necessary links in the chain of defenses. . . . It is not safe to have less than a regiment of infantry on Morris Island, which, if once carried by the enemy, would expose Fort Sumter to be taken in reverse and demolished."

I was making the greatest exertion to have finished an important battery which, by my orders, was in progress of construction near the south end of Morris Island. Want of adequate labor prevented its completion in time. Another paramount obstacle also thwarted me : no heavy guns could be procured for it.

On the 7th of July four monitors were seen off the Charleston bar. The fleet had not otherwise increased up to that day. During the night of the 8th the noise, apparently made by extensive chopping with axes, was distinctly heard from the extreme south-

* General Gillmore's book "Engineer and Artillery Preparation against Charleston," p. 18.

ern end of Morris Island. The sound reached us, but we were unable to distinguish what was really going on. The sand hills, so numerous on Little Folly Island, afforded much facility to the enemy for keeping us in the dark as to his ulterior designs, although nothing indicated any effort on his part at concealment. The following is an extract from my official report to the War Department upon this important event in the siege of Charleston :

“On the night of the 9th of July an immediate attack being anticipated, the whole infantry force on the island was kept under arms at the south end.

“At five o'clock on the morning of the 10th of July the enemy's attack commenced by a heavy fire on our position, from a great number of light guns apparently placed during the preceding forty-eight hours in the works lately thrown up on Little Folly Island. Three monitors about the same time crossed the bar, and brought their formidable armaments to bear on the left flank of our position, while several barges with howitzers in Light-house Inlet flanked our right.

“For two hours the enemy kept up the fire from these three different points, our batteries replying vigorously.

“The barges of the enemy, filled with troops, having been seen in Light-house Inlet in the direction of Black Island, and Oyster Point being the nearest and most accessible spot for debarkation from them, it was justly considered the one most necessary to protect, and therefore the infantry, consisting of the Twenty-first South Carolina Volunteers, about 350 effective men, were stationed by Colonel R. F. Graham, the immediate commander of the island, on the peninsula leading to that point.

“In this position the infantry were unavoidably exposed to the fire of the boat howitzers, but sheltered by the nature of the ground from that of the guns on Little Folly Island.

“About seven o'clock the enemy advanced on Oyster Point in a flotilla of boats containing between two and three thousand men, a considerable portion of whom endeavored to effect and hold a landing, in which they were opposed by the infantry until about eight o'clock, when another force of two or three regiments made good a landing in front of our batteries on the south end of Morris Island proper. These formed in line of battle on the beach, and advanced directly upon our works, throwing out on each flank numerous skirmishers, who very soon succeeded in flanking and taking the batteries in reverse. After an obstinate resistance our artillery had to abandon their pieces—three 8-inch navy shell guns, two 8-inch sea-coast howitzers, one rifled 24-pounder, one 30-pounder Parrott, one 12-pounder Whitworth, three 10-inch sea-coast mortars—eleven in all—and fall back.

“Two companies of the Seventh South Carolina Battalion, which arrived about this time, were ordered to the support of the batteries ; but they could not make head against the overwhelming numbers of the enemy.

“This success of the enemy threatened to cut off our infantry engaged at Oyster Point from their line of retreat ; and, consequently, about nine o'clock,

Colonel Graham gave the order to fall back to Battery Wagner, which was accomplished under a severe flanking fire from the monitors.

"The enemy thus gained possession of the South end of Morris Island, by rapidly throwing a large number of troops across the inlet, which it was impossible for the available infantry on the spot, about 400 effective men, to resist.

"It was not the erection of works on Little Folly Island that caused the abandonment of our position; it was clearly the want on our side of infantry support, and the enemy's superior weight and number of guns, and the heavy supporting brigade of infantry, that swept away our feeble, stinted means of resistance."

It is not true that this attack was a surprise. The commander of Morris Island and all the troops on it knew that the enemy was preparing to make one from Little Folly. I knew it as well, and the War Department was also aware of it; for I had kept the Secretary of War and General Cooper well advised of all the operations of the enemy in my command, and, especially, of his movements in that particular quarter. The real cause of the Federal success, on the 10th of July, was insufficiency of our infantry force on Morris Island; let alone the fact that I could not, for want of necessary labor, complete the battery already referred to, and which was of no service whatever to us on that occasion. The following table shows what force I could dispose of, at that time, in and around Charleston, that is to say, in all the First Military District of South Carolina. I had:

1.—On James Island—			
Infantry	1,184		
Heavy and light artillery	1,569		
Cavalry	153		
			2,906
2.—On Morris Island—			
Infantry	612		
Heavy and light artillery	289		
Cavalry	26		
			927
3.—On Sullivan's Island—			
Infantry	204		
Heavy and light artillery	726		
Cavalry	228		
			1,158
4.—In Charleston proper—			
Infantry	462		
Heavy and light artillery	235		
Cavalry	153		
			850
Total			5,841

Nor should it be forgotten that the enemy, in order to divert our attention from the main object he had in view, was not only landing troops at the southern end of Morris Island, but was also seriously threatening James Island, and had made a strong demonstration against it by the Stono River. It is clear to me that, but for my determination not to weaken my force there for the support of Morris Island, this demonstration would have been converted into a real attack, the results of which might have been far more disastrous; for, as I have already stated, James Island was the avenue of approach I dreaded the most to see selected, and which on that account I feared the enemy would select. It was, in reality, the "entrance gate" to the avenue which would have almost assuredly led into the heart of Charleston. The enemy had preferred breaking in through the "window;" and I certainly had no cause to regret his having done so. That he was held in check there, and never got in, until we finally opened the "gate" ourselves, toward the end of the war, is not to be denied. On the evening of July 10th detachments from various Georgia regiments which I had called for, began to arrive. They were re-enforced by the Twenty-first South Carolina Volunteers, and Nelson's Battalion now garrisoned Battery Wagner. I also urgently pressed the War Department to order back Clingman's brigade to Charleston. Part of it came on the 12th. The day before, at early dawn, the enemy assaulted Battery Wagner, but was repulsed with great loss to him. Two Federal officers and some ninety-five men were killed within pistol range of our works. We captured six officers and about one hundred and thirteen men. Most of them were wounded. Three monitors and three wooden gun-boats assisted the Federal land forces on that occasion. Battery Wagner was again shelled on the 12th by part of the fleet, while the land forces were engaged in putting up works near the middle of Morris Island. They were very much disturbed by the accurate firing of Fort Sumter and of Battery Gregg.

On the arrival of the whole of Clingman's brigade and of other troops called from the Second and Third Military Districts of my Department, I was about to issue an order for an attempt in force to expel the enemy from Morris Island. But the configuration of that island, its proximity to the Federal monitors, and the fact, no less important, that fully four thousand men would have been required for that purpose, convinced me that no step of that kind

could have then been successful. Our limited means of transportation was also a great drawback to us, and strongly militated against the adoption of any such offensive move on my part. Upon further reflection I came to the conclusion that we could do more toward checking the progress of the enemy by erecting new batteries on James Island and by strengthening others already in position there and elsewhere. I issued orders to that effect and they were vigorously carried out. Battery Simkins, in advance of Fort Johnson, on Shell Point, was one of these new batteries. It was armed with one 10-inch columbiad, one 6.40 Brooke, and three 10-inch mortars; and guns were taken from Sumter to increase the armament of Moultrie.

The damages in Battery Wagner were soon repaired, and the fire of the monitors and gun-boats regularly answered. Three guns, instead of two, were mounted at the Shell Point Battery; and I also caused gun-batteries of 10-inch columbiads to be substituted for the mortar-batteries at Fort Johnson. I ordered the forces on Morris Island to be reduced to a number strictly sufficient to hold our works there. And the enemy's pickets along the Stono having been increased at that time, I instructed General Hagood to advance at once on the position occupied by the Federals, and thus ascertain what was their real intent as to James Island. This was done with General Hagood's usual promptitude of action, and on the 16th the Federal forces were driven to the shelter of their gun-boats, our troops occupying the ground they had lost on that occasion. My order to Major Harris, Chief-Engineer, was, nevertheless, "to increase the batteries on James Island bearing on Morris Island by at least twenty guns on siege carriages, so as to envelop the enemy with a 'circle of fire' whenever he might gain possession of the north-east end of Morris Island; all works to be pushed on day and night." * On the 18th the Federal troops crowded the south end of Morris Island and took position behind their breastworks. It was clear that another attempt was about to be made against Wagner, and it was made with no less vigor than obstinacy. The "New Ironsides," five monitors, and a large wooden frigate joined in the bombardment. The firing of the enemy was more rapid on that occasion than it had ever been before. General Taliaferro, of Virginia, the gallant and efficient officer in command of Battery Wagner at the time,

* "Military Operations of General Beauregard," vol. ii., chap. xxxii., p. 117.

estimated "that nine hundred shot and shell were thrown in and against the battery during the eleven hours that the bombardment lasted." Wagner answered but slowly to this terrible onslaught. Not so, however, with Sumter and Gregg, which fired with even more rapidity than the enemy, and, as ever, did splendid work. After dusk on the same evening the Federal fleet was seen to retire and the land forces advanced to attack Wagner. They displayed great determination. A portion of them succeeded in crossing the ditch and actually gained a foothold on the southern salient of the battery. General Hagood, with Colonel Harrison's Thirty-second Georgia, arrived opportunely at that hour, as per orders received from me, and was of great assistance in precipitating the flight of the enemy, though it had fairly begun before his arrival. In my report of this incident of the day is found the following language :

"The assault was terribly disastrous to the enemy. His loss in killed, wounded, and prisoners must have been three thousand, as eight hundred bodies were interred in front of Battery Wagner on the following morning. . . . Our own loss during the bombardment and assault was one hundred and seventy-four, killed and wounded."

From that time up to the evacuation of Morris Island, the enemy scarcely allowed a day to pass without heavily firing upon our works—sometimes with his land forces alone, at other times with these and his fleet combined. He was also busily engaged on his batteries and trenches, while, on our side, we were straining every nerve to repair the damages done to our works and to strengthen the weakened walls of Sumter, whose disarmament was carefully carried on at night, in view of the disastrous effects of the enemy's heavy guns, from stationary batteries which would eventually render it untenable as an artillery post. That such a result was inevitable no one could possibly doubt, and that the whole of Morris Island would, sooner or later, fall into the hands of the enemy, was no less evident. But, so long as the batteries in process of construction on the main were unfinished, I had resolved to hold Wagner and Gregg to the last extremity. Every movement of the enemy was, in the mean time, watched with the utmost vigilance ; while the accurate firing of Sumter, Gregg, and Wagner continued to seriously interfere with the working parties engaged on his lines of gradual approaches.

Among the most memorable incidents of this period of the

siege was the seven days' bombardment of Fort Sumter, which commenced on the 17th of August and lasted up to the 23d. It appeared to be, on the part of the Federals, a desperate and final attempt to force the surrender of the fort, and thus effect the reduction of Morris Island, and even of the City of Charleston. This was evidenced by the peremptory demand which I received from General Gillmore on the 21st, for the "immediate evacuation of Morris Island and Fort Sumter," followed by the threat that, if within "four hours" after the delivery of his letter into the hands of the commander of Battery Wagner no reply was had, he would "open fire on the City of Charleston from batteries already established within easy range of the heart of the city." This communication reached me after the time specified, as must have been anticipated by General Gillmore; for it was evident that no message could go from Battery Wagner to Charleston and be answered within the limited space of "four hours."

I protested against the bombardment of a city filled with old men, women and children, before giving the customary notice of three or four days in which to allow them to escape from danger. From a work which was called "the Swamp Angel," because of the spot where it had been erected, the enemy, with an eight-inch Parrott rifle-gun, and before receiving my answer, did open fire upon "the heart" of the city. I have reason to believe, however, that the energy of my protest, which in due time reached the head-quarters of the Federal commander, forced him to somewhat recede from the position he had at first taken; for he ultimately ordered the firing upon the city to be suspended for the space of two days. When resumed it was not continued long; the "Swamp Angel" gun, after thirty-six rounds, very fortunately burst, and none other was mounted in that locality to take its place. The result of the seven days' bombardment of Sumter was to convert that historic fort into a confused mass of crumbling *débris*, but without altogether impairing its capacity of resistance. The greatest danger threatening the garrison just then, and one, no doubt, counted upon by the enemy, was the probability of the explosion, by shot and shell, of its powder magazine, which was, indeed, momentarily apprehended by the gallant men within the work.

G. T. BEAUREGARD.

(To be Concluded.)